



Horseytalk.net BRIDLEWAYS WATCH

Natural England put this cattle grid in the middle of a bridlepath

It's against the law.

But they are refusing to move it.

How legal is that?

Local riders and their supporters are against it. Over 1,200 people have signed a petition protesting against it.

The local St Just Town Council voted overwhelmingly against it.

Cornwall Council declared it unlawful.



But it is still there.

It is a cattle grid which Natural England, the Government's Environmental watchdog have illegally installed across the complete width of a public footpath and customary bridleway.

"It's absurd," says Ian Cooke, a one-time rider who launched the Save Penwith Moors campaign. "If I did anything wrong, the authorities would come down on me like a ton of bricks. Natural England does something wrong, it doesn't seem to make any difference. What's more through their illegal actions they are grossly inconveniencing a great many people. Not just riders but also dog walkers, hikers not to mention the thousands of tourists who visit the moors every year."



Ian makes a further point.

Not only is the cattle grid illegally installed across the complete width of a well-used track blocking all access by riders, there are also no signs warning riders that it is there.

"If you don't know the moors, if you're a visitor you can be cantering along the track and then suddenly it is there. There are no signs. No warnings. Luckily, nothing has happened so far but it so easily could."





He should know. For over 10 years he rode all over this moor, over 100 hectares of open heathland close to Land's End.

"I was lucky," he says. "I rode it before the days of barbed wire and cattle grids. You could go anywhere. It was wonderful"

But illegal cattle grids are not the only problem facing riders on Carnyorth Common, which is just one area of open access moorland in Penwith under threat from enclosure.

A few years ago Natural England decided to fence the moor so the land could be grazed by cattle. They agreed that standard width bridleway gates would be installed at all the current access points. They agreed that the gates would meet Cornwall County Council's specification for bridleway gates. They also agreed that on either side of the gates they would install mounting blocks for riders who were unable to operate the gates while on horseback.

What happened?

Natural England did not install the gates to the specification they agreed let alone to any safety standard whatsoever.

When asked why they didn't agree to the original three points which were hammered out between them and the British Horse Society, they shrug their shoulders, say the project has been completed, it is time to move on.

But still the problems are there. Still the problems are getting worse.



The cattle grid

Because it obstructs a well-used track that prevents horse riders and walkers from passing freely and safely.

Gates

The gates are causing more and more injuries to horses and riders. Hardly a week goes by without a rider or a horse being injured or severely inconvenienced.

Cattle

The cattle grazing the moor are terrifying not only horses but also walkers. Again, they have caused accidents and injuries.

The result: Fewer and fewer riders as well as walkers are using the moors

Says Ian Cooke, "It's almost as if Natural England have decided to get rid of riders and walkers altogether. They seem to be doing everything they can to annoy and frustrate walkers and horse riders enjoying what was once a wide-open beautiful and unobstructed wilderness



popular with locals and tourists alike."



Says Adrian Bigg, The British Horse Society Bridleways and Access Officer for Cornwall, "The British Horse Society is very concerned about the safety of riders on the moor, although the BHS does not oppose in any way the concept of conservation grazing. The concern of the BHS is that safe access for horses is preserved."

"However, the current situation on Carnyorth Moor is totally unsatisfactory and the BHS is shortly to have a long promised site meeting with Natural England to look at the gates and potential remedies."

"With regard to the cattle grid, Cornwall Council is aware that the cattle grid is an illegal obstruction, as it is installed completely across the track which is a definitive footpath. The BHS understands that the Council is considering the course of action to take. Although Natural England have provided a side gate, it is not on the definitive right of way. Also cattle grids on tracks which are regularly used by horses do present an inherent safety hazard as they are not easily visible or forseen."

"The BHS is very concerned that these issues have been ongoing for a year without resolution. It incredulous that, despite causing accidents, no action has been taken to make the gates safe by modifying them to the specification originally agreed."

"The BHS hopes that common sense will prevail and that Natuarl England will reinstall the gates to the specification that was originally agreed, and that if grazing continues that a regime will be implemented that will enable users to continue to enjoy the moor and that it will achieve the supposed objectives of managing the heath, which at the moment it is not doing."

- Have you had problems with bridlegates?

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